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Big B comes to NY Madame Tussauds

by Prakaash M Swami/ SATimes

New York (SATimes): Bollywood icon Amitabh Bachchan's life-size wax figure was unveiled at Madame Tussauds Wax Museum here on Thursday as part of the opening of Bollywood zone in the popular tourist attraction of New York in connection with the Asian American Heritage Month celebrations now under way.

Bachchan's figure is dressed in a traditional sherwani suit with a gold and black scarf draped around his neck. It is the first figure to be part of the Museum's all new Bollywood Zone that was created after numerous visitors' requests. The other Indian figures in New York are Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi whereas the museum's London counterpart has Shah Rukh Khan and Amitabh's bahu Aishwarya Rai besides the leg-

Bachchan Continued on page 3



Singh is still King!

Manmohan Singh sworn in as Prime Minister for a second term after the stunning poll victory of his party Congress-led front

New Delhi (IANS): Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Friday took oath along with 19 cabinet colleagues to begin a second five-year term at the head of a multi-party government in which his Congress party is the overwhelmingly dominant partner after a sweeping win in India's general elections.

He is only the second prime minister after Jawaharlal Nehru to have a second innings after a successful five-year term, second lead.

Also present at the swearing in were Congress president and ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Vice President Hamid Ansari, BJP's prime ministerial candidate L.K. Advani, former prime minister I.K. Gujral and Sitaram Yechury of the CPI-M.

Among the new entrants in the cabinet are Mamata Banerjee, the Tri-



President Pratibha Patil administering the oath of office of Prime Minister to Manmohan Singh at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Friday.

namool Congress leader, Rajasthan Congress unit president C.P. Joshi, and

former Karnataka chief minister S.M. Singh Continued on Page 4

AAPI-SATimes create history

We are delighted to announce that The South Asian Times would be the Grand Media Sponsor (Daily) to the AAPI (American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin) Convention 2009 in Orlando, Florida from June 10-14, 2009. It's the very first time, in the history of South Asian media in the US and the AAPI Convention, that four editions of a daily newspaper will be published during the convention covering the grand event. No other South Asian publication has ever done a similar project in the past in the US. We will do 96 hours of continuous instant reporting and real-time newspaper publishing.

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Person of the Week

Shilpa Agarwal: Voice of the dispossessed

by Archana Chaudhary/SATimes

Los Angeles based writer and academician Shilpa Agarwal's debut novel "Haunting Bombay," is creating waves in the literary world. USA Today describes it as an "Intriguing debut novel...draws on the broader mystical culture that envelops India," while Kingdom Books says "It's a book of wide sweeping imagery and unforgettable characters..." Recently Shilpa also picked up a First Words Literary Prize for South Asian writers. In an exclusive interview to the SATimes Shilpa chats about her novel.

You've lived all your life in US, so why a book based in Bombay (Mumbai)?

Shilpa: I was born in Bombay. When I was young my parents moved to the US, but I've always seen Bombay as the place of my roots. I spent a lot of summers there and I really connect with it.

What is the book about?

Shilpa: "Haunting Bombay" is a literary ghost story set in the plush neighbourhood of Malabar Hills in 1960's Bombay. It is about the tragic death of a child that has been repressed by a grieving family, and the courageous journey of the protagonist – Pinky an adopted child, in the same family who untangles the mystery behind the death all the while being haunted by the ghost of the dead child. Most of the times we only get to hear one side of the story.

Your book has super natural elements in it. Did you ever get spooked while writing?

Shilpa: (Laughs) My book is much more than just a ghost story. It's about three generations of the wealthy Mittal family and how the ghosts of their past catches up with them. A child drowns in the bungalow and promptly the ayah – a young uneducated fisher-woman – is sacked and nobody ever talks about the incident after that day.

My story is also about the silent people who have been excluded from the realm of human

utterance. It is about their version of the truth and how they communicate. The supernatural element in my book is a metaphor for the dispossessed. Yes I did experience a few supernatural experiences while I was writing. Some times when I would wake up early in the mornings to write out a particular scene, I'd feel a pain in the neck or goose bumps on my skin.

Many writers borrow from real life experiences for their books. What about you?

Shilpa: One of the reasons I decided to write about the 1960's era is because I had a lot of

material on that. The protagonist Pinky is based on my mother – who underwent the India-Pakistan partition and later lived in Bombay. My mom struggled a lot during the exodus from India to Pakistan and she almost lost my grandmother twice during that time. I interviewed a lot of my family members and did include it in the story. I took bits from past family history but largely it's fictional.

Who is the inspiration behind your book?

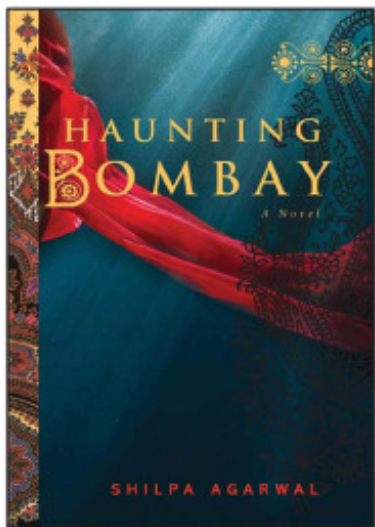
Shilpa: I guess there have been two major inspirations behind my book. Firstly I've always been in-

trigued by family stories that have been passed. Most of the times these stories are skeletal versions of what actually happened and secondly I thought what if we could go back in time and reconstruct what actually happened and what has been told. What if we could hear the voices of those who were excluded and not let to speak? What would be their version of their story?

What was the biggest challenge you faced while writing the book?

Shilpa: For me the biggest challenge was persevering. The book took about nine years to write and publish and the biggest challenge was to keep going back and doing it. I had to evolve organically and keep writing.

How did you keep yourself motivated



Shilpa Agarwal's debut novel "Haunting Bombay," is kicking up a storm in the literary world. She won a First Words Literary prize for South Asian writers for her work.



LA based Academician, writer and mother of two Shilpa Agarwal has lived all her life in the US but says her roots are in Mumbai, India.

through the nine years?

Shilpa: I don't know? Honestly, I've no idea about it. Something inside me resonated and I knew that I had to write it and finish it. Through the nine years, my life went through a lot of changes. I had two kids and when they were little it was tough to find time but I kept going back and writing in snatches of time. There was always a joy in writing. The book has won wide acclaim and an award. Did you expect it?

Shilpa: I'm just letting things unfold slowly as they come and taking it one day at a time. I don't have any expectations and am just enjoying the process.

What would you say is the secret behind its success?

Shilpa: I'd say it's all about patiently unwrapping the story. The story has to reveal in its own time. I kept thinking of it as a stage with many curtains, you have to open one at a time. I always saw the bigger picture and I didn't want to rush it.

Any other books in the offing?

Shilpa: Yes, presently I'm working on my second book.

Your message to upcoming South Asian writers would be?

Shilpa: Follow your heart and write what you feel is true to you. Do it and let it unfold

in its time. Write what you believe in and don't really think of its results.

Apart from writing what are the other things that you are passionate about?

Shilpa: I'm passionate about being a mom. I love my family and my husband. I also enjoy music; roller-blading and I even take a kick boxing class.

BOOKS THAT HAVE INSPIRED ME

Different books have inspired me at different points of time.

While in college I was inspired by Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi who has written powerfully about Egyptian women and their struggle in a rigid society.

I have also looked up to Isabella Allende – I like the mysticism in her books and how well she mixes myth and reality.

Toni Morrison's writings have also had a huge influence on me. I like the way she connects a tragic past to the haunting present. In fact readers have said that my book reminds them of Morrison's book "Beloved."



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